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TAGS: PREL PGOV HR  
SUBJECT: CROATIAN PRESIDENT-ELECT DISCUSSES FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: President-elect Josipovic's first foreign policy priority will be supporting Croatia's EU accession, where his clear views on some key issues -- including corruption and cooperation with the ICTY -- should give a boost to Croatia's prospects for expeditious completion. Josipovic's second key foreign policy objective will be improving relations with neighboring countries. He is one of the only national Croatian political figures willing to entertain publicly that Croatia might withdraw its ICJ case against Serbia, although he has said that this could only be done if Serbia first took additional steps to resolve outstanding issues. While personally opposed to the Croatia-Slovenia border Arbitration Agreement, he has pledged to support implementation of the agreement. On BiH he has stressed that Croatia should not tell the Bosnian Croat community in BiH what to do. Post's assessment is that Josipovic, given his reputation as a reformist politician and respected legal scholar who has never exhibited a particularly nationalist streak, should be able to make significant contributions to both the EU and regional cooperation objectives. END SUMMARY.

First Priority: Croatia Joining EU

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¶2. (SBU) In discussions with the media on January 11 and 12, president-elect Ivo Josipovic elaborated on his foreign policy priorities. First, he stressed the importance of Croatia becoming a member of the EU and underscored that the fight against corruption would be a vital part of this effort as well as being intrinsically valuable for Croatia's own domestic interests. Josipovic added that the EU had stricter criteria for Croatia than other countries that joined in the past, but that Croatia would be able to meet the benchmarks and be a better country for it.

¶3. (SBU) Regarding the ICTY, Josipovic has consistently called for Croatia to cooperate with the court and even drafted the original law regarding Croatia's cooperation. He also told the press on January 12 that as president he would not pardon anyone who was convicted of murder, rape, being a member of organized crime, or war crimes.

Second Priority: Good Neighborly Relations

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¶4. (SBU) Serbia and Kosovo: Josipovic emphasized good neighborly relations as the second key foreign policy objective for his presidency. Elaborating on this theme, Josipovic said that ties between Serbia and Croatia had progressed in the last ten years. He cited cooperation on missing persons, the procedure for returning cultural items, and Serbia's progress on war crimes issues as areas of improvement. The major outstanding issue was that Ratko

Mladic and Goran Hadzic had not yet been turned over to the ICTY. Josipovic is one of the few national Croatian political figures willing to entertain publicly the possibility that Croatia might withdraw its ICJ genocide case against Serbia, although he has stated that this could only be done if Serbia first took additional steps to resolve outstanding issues. He also said that Serbia's counter-suit for genocide at the ICJ lacked legal grounds. (Note: Josipovic served as the head of the legal team that drafted Croatia's genocide case against Serbia at the ICJ. End Note.) Josipovic believed that Serbia would eventually reconcile itself with Kosovo becoming an independent country, but expressed understanding for the GoS's current stance on the issue. When asked if he would first travel to Belgrade or Pristina, Josipovic said a visit to Belgrade would likely be first.

¶15. (SBU) Slovenia: On the Arbitration Agreement to settle the border dispute with Slovenia, Josipovic reiterated his view that it was a result of Slovenian "blackmail," and said that Croatia had lost rights accorded to it under international law by accepting the agreement. However, Josipovic stressed that as president he would respect what had been decided. (Note: Josipovic was one of the few members of Sabor to vote against moving ahead with the Arbitration Agreement. As an international law expert, he is clearly bothered by its ad hoc nature. However, contacts within the SDP have told us that they believe his decision to vote against it was as much, or more, about political positioning in the prelude to the presidential campaign, as it was about any sense that Croatia genuinely could have secured a better outcome. End Note.)

¶16. (SBU) BiH: On January 12, when asked in an interview about RS PM Dodik's calls for a referendum for the RS to succeed

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from the BiH, Josipovic stated that he viewed such a step as not in accordance with Dayton and unacceptable to the international community and BiH. He also stressed that he did not think Croatia was in a position to tell the Bosnian Croat community what to do. In an interview with BiH media, Josipovic denied that he had explicitly supported a third entity in BiH, emphasizing that he would honor any compromise agreed to by all three constituent peoples.

Comment

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¶17. (SBU) Josipovic's election should boost Croatia's prospects in the two key areas that he outlined as his foreign policy priorities. First, Josipovic's strong record of support for the ICTY process will add weight and gravitas to GoC efforts to resolve the concerns among a small number of EU states regarding Croatian cooperation with the Court. Josipovic's strong stance against corruption and his own clean reputation should also be an added boost to the anti-corruption efforts underway, and further allay EU concerns on that issue. In regional relations Josipovic, as the legal expert who worked on the case, will be able to speak authoritatively on the merits of dropping the Croatian ICJ genocide case against Serbia, under the right circumstances. Additionally, he could provide the GoC with cover should it be needed on the Arbitration Agreement with Slovenia. Josipovic, with a reputation as an international scholar who strongly supports human rights, is less likely to provoke negative reactions among non-Croatian audiences in the region, who might have found a staunchly nationalist Croatian president a more difficult interlocutor. END COMMENT.

FOLEY